

ISN'T NATURE WONDERFUL?¹

By OLIVE MCCLINTIC JOHNSON

LITTLE Boy Billy came up the steps bearing triumphantly a broad, flat canna leaf. His face wore the look of a discoverer. On the back side of the leaf, clinging by tenacious papillae, was an emerald caterpillar, distinguishable only by close observation. "Look, muvver," he said, and generously laid leaf and vermicular occupant in Lelia's lap, along with the rose, mauve, and amber silk threads with which she was embroidering, thereby innocently introducing a plebeian alpha to its patrician omega.

"What is it?" asked Lelia, smiling indulgently.

"Buggo," said Billy proudly, his hands folded behind him. He might have been another Columbus presenting his queen with the fruits of his voyage.

Lelia's first impulse was to brush the obnoxious insect away, but something in the eagerness of the flushed face stayed her hand. Billy was at the insect age which precedes the reptilian. His whole interest centered in buggos. Spiders gave him keen pleasure: he shrieked with delight at the beetles scurrying away to safety, when a board was lifted;

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he had already learned with bitterness the fallacy of the theory of the harmlessness of white-faced bumblebees, and beetles pleased him most of all. Sometimes he found them on the stems of hollyhocks, but the surest place was in the hearts of sunflowers. It was a pretty sight to see the little fellow standing atiptoe, straining to draw down the topmost blossom in which he searched eagerly for a concealed buggo. Insects were all buggos to him, and all were delightful. He had discovered a new specimen. "Where did you get it?" asked Lelia, simulating interest.

"'Westes finded it. He said the wind wocked it to s'leep in its cwadle."

Lelia's eyes kindled. Her appreciative glance rested upon Orestes, who worked faithfully mowing the lawn. The humble toiler had not been too busy to feed her small boy's fancy. Could she do less? She tossed her work aside and lifted Billy to her knee.

"It's a beautiful buggo," she said, trying to make up in warmth all that her response had lacked in spontaneity.

Billy was delighted. "You almos' couldn' see it, at first, could you, muvver?"

"No," admitted Lelia. "You see, it is so green, just the color of its cradle."

Then she told him how Nature often gives her children colors that beguile the eye—colors so like

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the surrounding environment that the small creatures are protected and able to elude and escape man, their natural enemy. With all his brains and his ability to think, man frequently overlooks and is deceived entirely by the simple unthinking creatures, colored by the hand of Nature.

Lelia's exposition of the theory of Protective Coloration had a sympathetic audience of two. For, unobserved by her, Orestes had dropped his work and edged nearer, drinking it all in. His interest was hardly less than Billy's.

"And sometimes," Lelia went on, "naughty creatures are protected by their color. In West Texas there are rattlesnakes just the color of the rocks, and I've heard of people in Louisiana and Arkansas sitting down on old logs that turned out to be alligators."

"Blooley!"

The exclamation came suddenly from Orestes, who had turned goggle-eyed at the startling revelation. Lelia looked up in surprise. She smiled at the emotional imagination of her colored servitor.

"How much have you heard of what I said, Orestes?"

"I heahed it all, Miss Lelia, an' iffen you'll 'scuse me I wan' to ax des one mo' li'l question."

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"What is it?"

"If it warn't fo' dey cullah, dey'd all been daid long ago, wouldn' dey—dem snakes an' alligators an' varmints an' sich? De white men would 'a' kilt 'em sho?"

"I expect so."

"Dey cullah is what saves 'em, den, ain't it?"

"Yes, that's just what I've been telling you. It's the theory of Protective Coloration, and"—she glanced downward at the inert, relaxed figure in her lap—"I see part of my audience has fallen asleep." Lelia arose and bore the little fellow, still tightly clasping the leaf, indoors.

Orestes had a way of storing novel thoughts in his mind, not knowing what eventualities might wake them into usefulness. With an entirely new idea for rumination, he turned back to his waiting lawn mower. As he propelled it back and forth he entertained himself mightily. To the tune of the revolving blades he chanted his monologue: "Cain' nuttin' happen to 'em. White man cain' git 'em! Nobody cain' git 'em! Hit's on account o' dey cullah. De Lawd gin 'em dey cullah. Bress de Lawd! If you set down on one ob 'em, it's a alligator, an' iffen 'tain't a alligator, hit's a snake. Whoopee! Be keerful whar you sets. Dey cullah pertecks 'em."

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The Leaf Motor Car Company received a package by express that afternoon which had been eagerly awaited. It contained a shipment of curtain rods. The automobile factory had been behind with production, so that it only turned out essentials. Small accessories like nickel curtain rods had to wait. They were cleverly devised standards, made to fit upright into sockets on the doors and support the storm curtains, so that occupants of the car could enter or leave without the trouble of unfastening the curtains.

Every Leaf sold in weeks had been sold with the provision that the curtain rods should be supplied later. This had been quite satisfactory to all the buyers with the exception of Mr. Montgomery. Mr. Montgomery—familiarily called Monty—was the manager of the George Hotel. He had never owned a car before and he had always longed to. So when the time came, finally, that made him the proud possessor of a Leaf, he wanted it complete. Not that there was any necessity for the use of curtains—it was midsummer, and the sky had not so much as entertained the suspicion of a cloud for a month—but human nature came to the fore in Mr. Montgomery. He had no use for curtain rods, but he was entitled to them and he wanted them. So, on an average of once a day, he telephoned the Leaf Motor Car Company to ask if the rods had arrived. It was the office joke—the

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missing rods and the murmuring Monty. It irked Mr. Holmes. To have his telephone rung continually on the inconsequential business was annoying.

When Orestes reached the shop, following the completion of his morning's lawn mowing, one of his co-workers confided that matters were at a sad state in the office.

"Mist' Bill is sho got de distempah!"

"'Count o' which?" asked Orestes.

"Dat Mistuh Monty maddened him ag'in."

"Oveh dem curtum rods," said Orestes with swift intuition.

"Yeah."

"Umphm-m! I wisht cahs wuz bawned widout no curtums."

So, it may be easily understood with what satisfaction Orestes received the express package and bore it triumphantly to his employer. "Mist' Bill, Santa Claus is came," he announced happily.

"What is it?" asked Mr. Holmes shortly.

"Dem curtum rods."

"Praise be!" came the fervent response. "Here, take a set of them round to the George Hotel to Mr. Montgomery, quick!"

"Yassuh."

"Go at once. Stop whatever you are doing."

"Yassuh."

"And see that he gets them," added Mr. Holmes.

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"Don't trust them to anybody else. Put them in Monty's hands. Don't come back till you've done it."

"Naw, suh."

"What?"

"Yassuh."

"All right. Go!"

Orestes cranked the truck and started. It was only the distance of a few blocks to the hotel, but his master had counseled haste and, besides, he seldom went anywhere without the truck. He would deliver Mr. Monty's rods in a jiffy and return to the shop in haste to attend the more patient purchasers, who also awaited the belated equipment. This was a definite plank in Orestes' platform, but definite planks are sometimes lost in the perilous journey between their providing and their performing. The shop saw Orestes no more that day.

Mr. Holmes was really to blame. The curt insistence of his final instruction to Orestes caused the abscondence. How could his porter put the rods into Mr. Monty's hands when Mr. Monty was not there? How could Orestes return until he had fulfilled his mission? Mist' Bill had said stay, and stay he would—a modern colored Casa-bianca.

where Mr. Monty was or when he would return.

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Orestes waited. Not feeling quite at ease in the splendor of the gilded lobby, he betook himself to the basement. There was always the likelihood of finding some acquaintance among the constantly changing cooks and waiters. Orestes was not disappointed. As he passed the swinging doors of the kitchen and perceptibly slackened his pace to catch more fully the tantalizing odors, the doors opened and a familiar white-clad figure emerged, bearing a huge meat knife. It was Hosea Hupp.

"Name o' goodness, Hosea! What you doin' heah?"

"I's de 'sistant to de chef cook," grinned Hosea proudly.

"Is you? An' whar you gwine wid dat cleavah?"

Hosea's glance rested fondly on the giant snickersnee. "Dat's some baby, ain't it? Hit's mine. De hotel don' funnish 'em no mo'. When you comes to git a job as chef cook now, you brings yo' own knives wid you—des de same as a cahpenteh an' his tools. Hit's de only way; den eve'body kin hab de kine what's bes' suited to his han'."

"But whar is you gwine wid yo' chef-cook cleavah?"

"Hit's a li'l game," whispered Hosea. "While Mistuh Monty is gone de boys is habin' a li'l game in de sample room. Me an' de cleavah is gwine jine in."

"Me too," said Orestes, forgetting his errand and

the fact that it was always such accidental pleasuring that got him into trouble.

In the sample room was a motley crowd—cooks, waiters, bellmen, and baggagemen. The hotel's entire colored personnel, with the exception of the chambermaids and elevator girls, was grouped in expectant eagerness. Added to these were as many outsiders, drawn from the neighboring garages and shops by the glad word, mysteriously passed, that the bones were rolling. It was easily the largest indoor golf party that Orestes had attended recently, and many of the gamesters were his friends—Eliphilate Luck, Hiawatha Bones, Sloofoot Jackson, and Mannie Blair. The last-named came upon him suddenly. "Dawg-gone, Rest Ease!" he exclaimed gladly. "I wuz des fixin' to sen' afteh you."

"Wisht you had, Mannie," said Orestes regretfully, "so's I could 'a' brung some money. I is clean broke."

"Too bad, but you'll make a good man to hol' de stakes," averred Mannie. "Dat's safer'n playin', anyhow, 'caze ole Lif' Laig is in de game, an' de stakes is gwine be high."

Orestes's curiosity momentarily overcame his disappointment. "How come you is heah, Mannie? Is you wukkin'?"

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"Me? I ain', to say, wukkin'. I is de de haid waiteh!" he responded proudly.

"Naw?"

"Yes, I is. Ole Pompey Snow, what's been in all dese yeahs, is sick, an' I taken his place."

"What's de matteh wid ole Pompey? De Jawdge *Ho*-tel wouldn' be de Jawdge *Ho*-tel wid-out no Pompey."

"Dat's right," admitted Mannie. "Dey's sum'p'n de matteh wid his laig. I don' rightly knows what 'tis."

"Mebbe hit's de pel-laig-ra," suggested Orestes with ready sympathy.

"Umphm-m! I 'speck so. I wisht he would come back. I's gittin' tiahed of de job. You don' gits no tips hardly atall—not nuttin' lak des a plain waiteh. Look at dem birds dar flashin' dey rolls—eve'y cent was made in tips."

It was an opulent crowd. The high wages and easy money of the times were revealed in visible wealth of cash and clothes. Hardly a man did not bear a sizable roll and few who did not wear silk shirts. Orestes took the position of stakeholder, to which he had been unanimously elected, without a qualm as to his rough clothing, but he did find himself envying the boys who had money and were now crooning and chanting the mystic words of crap lore:

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"Come seben. Umphm-m! Heah I is—Li'l Joe. Shoots ten. Fade me!"

"Whar is you, Big Dick? Come on. Baby needs shoes. Be right. Oh, oh, busted molasses jug!"

"I got you faded. Hop along, Sistuh Mary! Come to me—dat's my honey chile! Whoo-ee-ee! 'Leben! Lady luck! You b'long to me!"

There was one of Orestes's friends to whom Lady Luck did not belong. This was Sloofoot. His luck with the galloping cubes was proverbially nil.

"Look at 'im," whispered Mannie, nudging Orestes. "He cain' shoot no mo'n nuttin'."

Orestes glanced at the consistent loser whose ill luck was most apparent. His teeth were clenched and his eyes drawn into mere slits with the intensity of his gambling fervor.

"What meks him presist?" he asked.

"Sloofoot is de kine," explained Mannie, "what'll spit at a crack fo' all he's got, an' he doan nevah do wins. Look at old Lif' Laig, he's des habin' his fun outa dat boy. He's already got all Sloofoot's money an', fo' de game is oveh, Sloofoot'll hab to borry his own clo'es to git home in."

Now, Hosea was more aggressive in his methods. Without any wish to express dubiety or discontent at Eliphilate's method of rolling the square babies, he, nevertheless, placed his cleaver in a conspicuous position. And, if Eliphilate did so much as slack in his "shakin' befo' de shootin'," one sug-

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gestive glance from Hosea in the direction of the weapon was sufficient to cause Eliphilate's swift repentance and a mending of his ways. In consequence, Hosea was winning. Orestes marveled at the richness of his imagination.

"Shake, rattle, and roll, des de same as a truck! An' I's a ridin' in it. Heah I come! Git outa my way! Gwine to jail! Who'll pay my fine? De square babies!"

Hosea was in the way of becoming a prophet, but he did not know it. He was too intent upon his winnings and his triumphant chant. Orestes, expanding in the aura of the game, was seized by an unconquerable desire to take part. It made him restless. He recalled that Slicker Ball, the boot-black at the corner, owed him a small sum. He felt that if he had it he could double, treble, even quadruple his money. The sight of Hosea's winnings unnerved him. He started up hastily. He would seize the unusual opportunity of winning from Eliphilate, the professional gambler of Deep Ellum.

"Mannie, you watch de game. I's gwine git a dollah an' fo' bits from a guy what owes me, an' come back an' git in de game 'ginst old Lif' Laig."

He hurried up in the east elevator. As he did so, down in the west elevator came the officers. They had sensed the game, as officers have a way of

doing, and the surprise was complete. They bagged the whole party and, when Orestes hurried back, money in hand, were loading the malefactors in the police wagon. Orestes could scarce believe his eyes. He felt like the boy who had been asleep when the circus parade came off. The lovely game was over and he had missed taking part. It did not occur to him to rejoice at his accidental escape from arrest. He looked at the money in his hand and groaned.

An officer accosted him. "Boy, is that your truck standing by the curb?" Orestes nodded. "Well, I'll have to borrow it. There's so many of these bloomin' crap shooters, I can't get 'em all in the wagon."

Orestes came to life suddenly. "Yassuh, yassuh," he said, "I'll go 'long to drive." . . .

That evening, after dinner, Orestes sauntered around the house, across the neatly manicured lawn, to where Mr. Holmes sat smoking. He had "thought left and thought right," as the Chinese say, and the result of his excogitations was that this was the best method of approach, in a difficult matter requiring great diplomacy. After dinner was good, and the soothing effect of a half-smoked cigar better. Besides, the drama was to be staged on an irreproachable lawn, made so by his own painstaking efforts. Mist' Bill could not fail in

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tractability with all this and especially the neat verbal approach which Orestes had selected.

"Mist' Bill, is you got any mo' dem curtum rods?" he asked airily.

Mr. Holmes looked up from his newspaper. "Cur-tain rods? Yes, I think so."

"Wal, I'll hatter git you to tooken a set outa my pay," said Orestes blandly.

"Take a set out of your pay? What for?" Mr. Holmes began to frown with returning consciousness of his porter's unexplained A. W. O. L.

Orestes avoided his master's eyes and replied meekly: "To give to Mistuh Monty."

The effect of the revelation was electrical. "Didn't you deliver Monty's rods?" demanded Mr. Holmes.

"Yassuh, yassuh, I delivered 'em," answered Orestes, batting his eyes swiftly as if expecting a blow, "but he didn' lak 'em."

Mr. Holmes tossed away his cigar. "Didn't like them! What was wrong?"

His employer was not reacting as Orestes had expected; he almost whispered his reply: "Dey wuz bent."

"Bent?"—incredulously.

"Yassuh, a aksumdent happen to dem curtum rods."

Mr. Holmes had rolled his newspaper into a

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club, and he now used it to emphasize his words. "Look here, boy," he said, shaking the paper, "you're holding something back. Now, you might as well tell me the whole thing. Out with it! Where were you all afternoon? Come clean!"

When Mist' Bill used that tone there was no use in further parley. Orestes sighed. To have all his elaborate approach come to naught! He took his seat on the steps. "Mist' Bill," he began, "in de fu'st place, I got 'rested."

"I knew it," said Mr. Holmes, looking down at him reproachfully.

"Yassuh, 'rested three times. Naw"—Orestes corrected himself punctiliously, "naw—des two times an' a half."

"Arrested two times and a half!"

"Yassuh."

Mr. Holmes shook his head in a baffled manner and motioned for Orestes to proceed. Speech had temporarily forsaken him. The kinks in a negro's brain were sometimes too much for even the clever manager of the Leaf Motor Car Company.

"You recumleck you tolt me to take Mistuh Monty's curtum rods to 'im—an' put 'em in his han's?"

"I certainly did, and it shouldn't have taken you more than ten minutes. That's the trouble with you, Orestes, you're weak on the wind-up. You have yet to learn that your errand is not finished until you

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report back to the shop. Think back over most of your troubles lately, and you'll find that they resolve themselves into failure to return——"

Orestes turned a chiding eye upon his employer.

"Mist' Bill, how could I return till I put 'em in his han's, an' how could I put 'em in his han's when his han's wuzn't dar?"

"Where were his hands?" thundered Mr. Holmes.

"I don' rightly knows—whareveh Mistuh Monty was, I speck," answered Orestes with Joblike patience. "Don' nobody in de *ho-tel* know whar he is, so I hatter des stall aroun' an' wait——"

"'Serene I fold my hands and wait,'" quoted Mr. Holmes with mock serenity.

Orestes looked up quickly, surprised at the uncanny prescience of his boss. "Yassuh, dat's 'zackly how come I come to git jugged! It wuz dat yaller gal, Sereny, what runs de elevator. She say she thunk Mistuh Monty is in de basement, so I rid down wid her, but he warn't dar atall—hit wuz some cullud boys," finished Orestes with an apprehensive glance, which Mr. Holmes was not slow to recognize as a path leading from the maze.

"What were they doing?" he asked.

"Shootin'," said Orestes, naively taking off the curse of gambling by his choice of terms.

"And you joined them," added Mr. Holmes, taking up the story.

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Orestes shook his head emphatically. "Naw, suh. I nevah had no money. I des helt de stakes."

"Then you got arrested," continued Mr. Holmes.

"Naw, suh, not to say 'rested. De offumcers, dey tuck de truck to carry de boys to jail in, 'kaze dey wuz fifty-fo' an' couldn't all ride in de Black Maria. An' I des go 'long to keep de truck comp'ny an' see don' nobody monkey wid de engine."

"That was the time you were only half arrested?"

"Yassuh."

"When was the next time?"

"It wuz 'count o' de stake money. Time I got th'oo payin' dem niggahs fines, dar wuz fo' dollahs an' six bits lef". An' don' nobody rightly know who it b'longs to, so all of us went in de alley an' wuz rollin' fo' it—when we got pinched ag'in!"

"I see," said Mr. Holmes, inwardly chuckling. "This was a full arrest, I take it?"

"Yassuh—cumplete."

"Fifty-four," mused Mr. Holmes. "Pretty well-filled jail, wasn't it?"

"Yassuh. Dey wuzn't room fo' no mo' 'sep'n two tramps what wuz put in dar dey say fo' fragrancy."

"Hurrah," laughed Mr. Holmes. "Well, how did the boys get out that time?"

"Law, suh, dey had to git out de bes' way dey could. Some o' dem birds is in dar yet. But eve'yone what had a boss or a wife got out. Mistuh

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Monty, he come down an' picked out his'n hisse'f."

"Hand-picked, eh?"

"Yassuh," Orestes went on, oblivious of the irony. "All de bell hops an' cooks an' waitchs in de *ho-tel* wuz dar. It wuz either pay dey fine an' git 'em out, or shut up de *ho-tel*."

"I see. Monty just gave the rest of them cursory notice, I suppose."

"Suh?"

"Cursory notice, I said."

"Yassuh, dat wuz it 'zactly. Cussery! I ain' nevah is heahed sich langwidge! I could feel de skin on my back cu'lin' up an' peelin' off. He sho do wag a wicked tongue, dat Mistuh Monty!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" burst unexpectedly from Mr. Holmes. Orestes looked up surprised. It was always a good sign when his master laughed. Mr. Monty's profanity, as he had cause to know, was no laughing matter, but Orestes was not one to cavil. He took what the gods provided and smiled back at Mist' Bill.

"Well, go on and tell me about the third time you were arrested," said Mr. Holmes, leaning back and lighting another cigar. He was now thoroughly enjoying the story with all the Southerner's indulgence for the negro's aberrations. "Tell me about the next arrest after Nannette got you out that time."

Orestes elevated his voice in polite denial. "Dat

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wuzn' de time Nannette got me out! She ain' had time to git dar yet. Mistuh Monty got me out dat time."

"Oh, Nannette got you out the *third* time!"

"Naw, suh, Mist' Bill," corrected Orestes with patient insistence. "Hit wuz de secon' an' a half."

"All right. Have it your way."

Orestes continued: "When Mistuh Monty got th'oo cussin' an' wuz linin' his niggahs up on de sidewalk, ready to march 'em back to de *ho-tel*, I thunk I would go up an' put de curtum rods in his han's. But, sho's you bawn, Mist' Bill, I cain' fin' dem curtum rods! I look eve'ywhar, an' finumally I went back in de jail to see if I lef' 'em in dar. An', if you b'lieve me, dar wuz one o' dem yaller, dish-faced, cimblin'-headed niggahs sellin' dem ve'ey curtum rods to a auto man fo' de price to pay his fine wid!"

"No?"

"Yassuh, an' I swoop down an' grab dem rods out o' his han' an' bat 'im oveh de haid wid 'em. Yassuh," added Orestes with contrition, "I fo'git all 'bout dem rods bein' new, an' I batted 'im hahd. An', fu'st thing you know, dem rods wuz all bent up, an' Mistuh Monty say he cain' use 'em."

"Of course not," howled Mr. Holmes. "But how about the boy's head?"

"Law, suh, dat wuz de leas' trouble. I ain' made no impreshum on dat niggah's haid at all.

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But de offumcer say we wuz fightin', an' I hab to pay a nudder fine!"

"Oh, that was the one Nannette paid!"

"Yassuh, Nannette got dar des in time."

"It would have been too bad to have disappointed her."

"Yassuh."

Orestes paused. He felt that he had made a good case; he awaited the verdict of the judge with complacency. But, Othello-like, his story being done, his master gave him for his pains a world of trouble. It was not any one thing which Orestes had done, but the cumulative effect of his misdeeds gave his master a sudden soberness.

"I wonder what I ought to do with you, boy?" began Mr. Holmes in a judge-like preamble. "Arrested three times in one afternoon!"

"Two times and a ha—" Orestes began in an undertone.

"Shut up! You're hardly out of one trouble before you're into another. It's hard for me to face the prospect of a long life marred by your foolish escapades." Mr. Holmes shook his head in mock dejection.

Orestes wagged his own head from side to side in amiable response.

"I wonder why I don't just kill you and be done with it!"

"I know why," answered Orestes politely.

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The surprising answer had much the same effect as a cold shower. Mr. Holmes looked up quickly, suspecting impudence. But there was no hint of intentional disrespect in Orestes's placid countenance. His statement was harmless. His employer had asked a question, and, as he knew the answer, politeness demanded that he proffer it.

"Why?" asked Mr. Holmes.

"Hit's on account o' my cullah."

"Color?"

"Yassuh. De Lawd made me black a puppose."

"Great Baxter!"

"Yassuh," Orestes went on, enormously pleased at the opportunity of unfolding the recondite matter to his employer. "If it wuzn't fo' my cullah, I speck I'd been daid long ago. Some white man would jes nachelly 'a' kilt me, de same as dem alligators."

"What alligators?" asked Mr. Holmes wildly.

"Dey's some at de Zoo, Mist' Bill," returned Orestes with the utmost composure. "But de ones I meks correspondence to is wil', in dem furrin' countries lak Arkumsas, an' Asia, an' Spasia an'——"

"Stop!" shouted Mr. Holmes, impotently waving his hands. "You're crazy, or I am."

Orestes made bland denial. "Naw, suh, Mist' Bill, I ain' crazy. Miss Lelia tolt me an' Billy. De Lawd meks snakes, an' alligators, an' niggahs

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black a puppose." He smiled happily. "Dey cullah perळेcks 'em."

Mr. Holmes threw up his hands. "Can you beat it!" He caught the flutter of his wife's white dress as she passed the door. "Come here, Lelia," he called, "and see if you can make anything out of this fool boy's talk. He says you told him his color protects him."

"Oh, I know," laughed Lelia, as she responded. "He heard me explaining the theory of Protective Coloration to son this morning. Laddy had found an emerald caterpillar on a green leaf, and I told him that the insect's color saved it."

"I see," said Mr. Holmes, but the matter was still very obscure to him.

Lelia went on: "Orestes has made his own application, and I don't know that he is very far wrong. If he were a white boy, you'd have fired him long ago, but since he is as he is, you're going to hand him a cigar and forget all about it."

Orestes grinned with appreciation and looked at his master with confidence.

"I reckon you're right," laughed Mr. Holmes, reaching for his cigar case. "Here, boy, take this," he said, handing Orestes one of his favorites; "now, beat it to the garden hose and give this lawn a good soaking."

"Yassuh, yassuh," complied Orestes, jumping up with alacrity.

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A few minutes later he unreeled the hose and turned a fine spray on the velvety lawn. "He-he," he chuckled as he puffed his cigar. "Nachur sho am won'erful! I knowed I wuz safe." Then, with racial afterwit, he added: "Lawd! I is proud o' my cullah!"